

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001765

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [PTER](#) [FR](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH OFFICIALS ON LARSEN VISIT, LEBANON NEXT STEPS

REF: A. BEIRUT 816 (EXDIS)

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 805 (EXDIS)

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: MFA and Elysee officials are stressing the need for continued insistence on a full Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon before elections, in the wake of UN Special Envoy Larsen's meetings in Beirut and Aleppo. The GoF views a four to six-month Syrian withdrawal as too long. According to Chirac's Middle East advisor, Larsen expressed worry to the GoF that Syria may seek to sow inter-communal violence by targeting Lebanon's pro-Syria camp, including a possible Nasrallah assassination. Larsen also expressed a preference for delaying release of the Fitzgerald report, and criticized the Lebanese opposition for not being more pragmatic on the need for a new government. French officials agree with Larsen that continued delays in forming a new Lebanese government could delay elections and full Syrian withdrawal, and view the "dump Lahoud" demands of the opposition as counter-productive. French officials continue to commend U.S.-GoF cooperation on Lebanon, but suggest that we may eventually part ways on the Hizballah issue or regime change in Syria. MFA officials also report that the GoF has no enthusiasm for an international force in Lebanon, that the EU may soon send election observer trainers to Lebanon, and that FM Barnier may attend the March 22-23 Arab League summit, where he will avoid contact with Lebanese or Syrian officials. End summary.

LARSEN VISIT

[1](#)2. (S) UN Special Envoy for UNSCR 1559 implementation Terje Roed-Larsen visited Paris March 14 and had a working lunch with Presidential Diplomatic Advisor (NSA-equivalent) Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, MFA A/S-equivalent for Near East Jean-Francois Thibault, and MFA IO A/S-equivalent Jean-Maurice Ripert. We received readouts on Larsen's visit from Presidential Middle East Advisor Dominique Boche March 16 and from MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant Christian Jouret March 15. Jouret stressed that the GoF opted to receive Larsen with maximum discretion and not at the presidential or ministerial level to avoid feeding perceptions that Larsen is controlled by the GoF and USG. Jouret said the GoF was encouraged by Larsen's meeting with Bashar and cautiously optimistic that Bashar would follow through on his commitments, but concluded that the lack of a timetable for full withdrawal was insufficient. Jouret described Larsen as optimistic (more so than the GoF) and determined, and convinced that Bashar understood the gravity of the current situation and the accusations against him on Hariri's assassination. Both Jouret and Boche concurred that the four to six month full withdrawal suggested by Bashar to Larsen (ref b) was "too long."

[1](#)3. (S) According to Elysee Advisor Boche, Larsen stressed four additional points to the GoF: 1) the need for the international community to continue to insist upon a full (troops and security services) Syrian withdrawal before elections, to avoid giving the impression of being satisfied by Syrian steps so far; 2) worry that Syria may seek to sow inter-communal violence by assassinating a major figure in the loyalist camp, possibly Hizballah leader Nasrallah; 3) the need to delay release of the Fitzgerald report, to avoid the impression that it is linked to Larsen's visit; and 4) the need for the Lebanese opposition to be more realistic on the urgency of forming a new Lebanese government, without which full Syrian withdrawal and timely parliamentary elections would not be possible. Boche stressed that the GoF shared the view that a forming a new GOL was imperative, and opined that a neutral, technical government might be a more feasible option than a national unity government, given GOL unwillingness to meet opposition demands to fire GOL security officials. Boche added that the calls by some oppositionists for a Lahoud resignation were counterproductive, as Lahoud's dismissal would result in a further impasse that would serve Syrian interests.

[1](#)4. (C) Jouret told us separately that FM Barnier, during a March 11 meeting with a visiting Lebanese opposition delegation led by Marwan Hamade, urged the group, to no avail, to show more flexibility in forming a national unity government with PM Karami. Jouret described the delegation

as unrealistic on its prospects for winning elections; the group expressed confidence that it could win at least 50 percent of the vote if elections were free and fair. Jouret also commented that the group did not appear to have a political plan beyond getting Syria out of Lebanon and clearing the GOL of pro-Syrian elements after their presumed electoral victory. Jouret conceded that the massive March 14 demonstration changed the dynamic in the opposition's favor since Barnier's March 11 meeting, and that the degree to which both camps could mobilize numbers in the street would affect the political jockeying now underway.

PARTING OF WAYS OVER HIZBALLAH?

15. (C) Both Jouret and Boche commended GoF-U.S. cooperation on Lebanon and U.S. willingness to "listen to" French views; at the same time, they both speculated that our common approaches may diverge eventually over Hizballah, once full Syrian withdrawal is achieved. Jouret described Hizballah dismantling as the real problem in UNSCR 1559 implementation, now that Bashar had already caved, in principle, to Larsen on full withdrawal. Jouret asked rhetorically how we could achieve the dismantling of Hizballah, expressing doubt on the Lebanese army's capacity to do so. He added that the Lebanese opposition, during their meeting with Barnier, stressed the view that Hizballah was a longterm internal question, not an international issue. In the opposition view, dismantling of Hizballah could only come after Hizballah's full integration as a political player, and not the other way around, as previewed in UNSCR 1559. The GoF, meanwhile, was trying to approach the Hizballah issue on a pragmatic basis, rather than an ideological one, which meant we should not expect a shift on EU Hizballah designation. Boche reiterated the latter point with us, and reiterated that the GoF wanted to avoid alienating Lebanon's majority Shi'a community, for which Hizballah remained the most credible political force. Boche added that the GoF hoped that a Syrian withdrawal would make Hizballah realize there was no alternative to political integration, however he was not confident this was the case. Syrian withdrawal would make Hizballah more dependent on Iran, whose intentions were unclear, though it had claimed to the GoF that it was playing a moderating influence on Hizballah in the current crisis. Boche opined that the Iranians had the tendency to see themselves as respected internationally only when they are perceived as dangerous.

16. (S) Jouret and Boche also expressed concern on prospects for the fall of Bashar's regime, an outcome which the GoF was not deliberately seeking. Jouret stressed the need for the U.S. and France to think about the implications of a full Syrian withdrawal and whether it might result in Bashar's overthrow and replacement by a more hardline leader, a prospect which Boche viewed as entirely possible. Boche described Bashar al-Asad as weak, lacking the experience and intelligence of his father, and losing control over the circle which surrounds him. He cited Larsen's description of the Syrian leader's nervousness during the recent Aleppo meeting, and added that the fact that recent pro-SARG demonstrations in Damascus had rallied such low numbers -- in the 30,000 range -- showed that Bashar was being sabotaged by others within his security services, possibly his powerful brother-in-law, SMI Chief Asif Shawkat. Jouret opined that he still viewed Bashar, despite all his weaknesses, as redeemable, but said the question remained whether the Syrian leader would rid himself of the circle around him, including the negative influence of FM Shara.

NEXT STEPS: ARAB LEAGUE, UN, OBSERVERS

17. (C) On next steps, Jouret stressed that the GoF would continue to advise Larsen to issue a tough report in April, and would continue to seek maximum pressure from Arab governments on Syria for full withdrawal. On the latter point, Jouret noted that next week's Arab League summit did not have Lebanon on the agenda, though the issue might be discussed in a smaller "group of seven" (NFI) within the gathering. Jouret reported that FM Barnier was likely to attend the Arab League summit, at the invitation of Algeria, but that the French FM would studiously avoid any contact with Lebanese or Syrian officials. On further UN action, Jouret said the MFA originally had been favorable to the idea of a PRST to follow the Larsen visit to Syria and Lebanon, but was overruled by the Elysee. Jouret stressed that the GoF was entirely negative on the idea of an international force or expanded UNIFIL filling the void left by a Syrian withdrawal, and cited the French experience of losing troops in Lebanon in the 1980's as weighing heavily on GoF thinking. On observers for the May elections, Jouret reported that the EU planned to send a small-sized team, to include two French nationals, to Lebanon to train Lebanese election observers in advance of the ballot and would not seek GoL permission to do so; the GoF was also intent on participating in an international observer mission, once the GoL relents on the issue. Boche, meanwhile, stressed to us that the real

determinant to whether elections would be free and fair was whether or not Syrian troops and security services fully withdrew prior to the ballot.
Leach